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ABSTRACT

Recommendations are offered to help administrators successfully implement mastery learning (ML). It is stated that: (1) ML requires watching both the achievement and satisfaction of learners; (2) consideration of teachers' knowledge and attitudes when training them in ML principles is critical; (3) a high level of skill and commitment is required of all involved administrators; (4) the administrative skills necessary for training teachers in ML are the same as the teaching skills necessary for working with children in the classroom. A 16-item checklist outlines desirable behaviors in three areas of administrator responsibility: staff development, instructional leadership, and school climate management. For each item, a desirable behavior is paired with an extreme example of an undesirable behavior. The emphases of the behaviors are: maintenance of an individualized model of staff development, making an effort as instructional leader to observe outcomes, and creating a school climate which provides for human resource development through caring behavior. It is suggested that the checklist first be used to rate the administrative staff as a whole, then to rate the individual. Scoring instructions for the checklist are given. (DC)

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Mastery Learning: Easier Said Than Done

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Mastery Learning -- easier said than done! Like everything in life that is good and looks "easy," ML demands much in preparation and polishing before it truly becomes the "ideal" product we strive to achieve in the end.

Implementing a Mastery Learning program requires very different kinds of instructional behavior for both teacher and administrator. This conclusion is based on over five years of experience working with Mastery Learning approaches in the local school district. Teachers and administrators must use time and human resources differently so that readiness is established for each new learning task. Each must assess and monitor the learner's development in both skill development and satisfaction with learning well. In short, those who choose Mastery Learning must be willing to watch closely both the **achievement** and **satisfaction** of learners.

Improved achievement and satisfaction is the essence of Bloom's theory of Mastery Learning. The theory rests on the premise that "success breeds success," with a positive self-concept being the basis for effective learning. However, putting ML into practice in the schools means not only attending to the needs of students, but to those of teachers as well.

Considering teachers' knowledge and attitudes when training them in ML principles and practices is critical to the success of the effort. Each administrator must be willing and able to meet the special needs of individual teachers, as well as to provide a variety of ways of using time and resources so that these specific needs are met.

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Mastery Learning does require a high level of skill and commitment on the part of all administrators in the school district, including the superintendent, curriculum specialists, other central office personnel, and each building principal. Each administrator must model to others his/her commitment to the ML effort. Administrators at all levels must support each other as all apply their technical, conceptual, and interpersonal skills to the tasks inherent in a Mastery Learning plan.

Administrative Skills

What skills are necessary for administrators as they guide staff members in implementing a Mastery Learning plan for instruction? As noted earlier, they are the very same skills that are necessary for teachers as they work with children in the classroom. After all, aren't teachers the first learners in a Mastery Learning model for instruction? Therefore, shouldn't time be viewed as a variable in the staff development process? Shouldn't planning for varying entry level behaviors relate to teachers in the same way as such planning does to students? Shouldn't positive climate, with emphasis on achievement and satisfaction, facilitate teacher growth while implementing a program for learning? I believe we should answer all these questions in the affirmative!

Administrators who guide an ML effort must consider three responsibilities: (1) staff development; (2) instructional leadership; and (3) climate management. The following checklist points out some rather extreme divergence in administrative styles. As you measure your capabilities as a facilitator of ML, the extreme answer in each set of questions can act as a learning tool to emphasize the better choice.

RESPONSIBILITY #1: THE ADMINISTRATOR AS STAFF DEVELOPER

The ability to conduct meaningful staff development activities is strongly emphasized as an administrative skill in the implementation of a Mastery Learning plan. Consider the following checklist as your opportunity to assess the skills of the administrative staff in your district. You might try the test first from the viewpoint of the administrative staff as a whole, then take it again using your own personal vantage point.

1. ___A. Is able to demonstrate knowledge of the theory of Mastery Learning; or

   ___B. Merely uses the jargon associated with Mastery Learning as discussed in popular literature.

2. ___A. Applies principles of human relations and group dynamics in teacher training activities; or

   ___B. Prefers to "lay it on" staff in shallow, meaningless programs.

3. ___A. Understands the dynamics of school organization and plans accordingly, involving those who need to be involved; or

___B. Goes off "half-cocked" and involves the wrong people in the process of staff development.

4. ___A. Utilizes creative and individualized approaches to staff development and inservice; or

___B. Depends upon "one-shot" lecture, large-group inservice programs.

5. ___A. Puts his/her "money where his mouth is" in matters of staff development and inservice; or

___B. The last thing considered in the budget is staff development.

RESPONSIBILITY #2: THE ADMINISTRATOR AS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER

In order to lead a Mastery Learning effort in an effective way, the administrator must possess refined skills in the analysis and appraisal of instruction. The administrator must be an instructional supervisor whose authority is based upon competence in the field of instruction, not on staff position. Again, check the items you feel are appropriate for the total administrative staff in general; then rate yourself as the points apply to you individually as an administrator.

1. ___A. Can define the instructional program and the identified skills to be mastered by students; or

___B. Has a vague notion of the exact skills which the program is designed to teach and hopes teachers are teaching them.

2. ___A. Can help find time and resources so that individual students get feedback and corrective help when needed; or

___B. Considers time a constant and insures that all students cover the same material -- whether they need it or not.

3. ___A. Can evaluate outcomes which insure that students are ready for the next learning task; or

___B. Permits students to engage in activities regardless of readiness.

4. ___A. Is able to evaluate learning -- not just teaching; or

___B. Evaluates the program only on the basis of teaching covered.

5. ___A. Shares in the selection of material being utilized and coordinates such materials with the goals and objectives of the program; or

___B. Allows textbook companies to provide the curriculum for the school.

RESPONSIBILITY #3: THE ADMINISTRATOR AS CLIMATE MANAGER

The management of school climate is one of the most crucial factors in implementing Mastery Learning. Careful attention should be paid to insuring high levels of productivity as measured by both the satisfaction and achievement of staff and students. A basic premise of ML is the maintenance of a positive self-concept among learners. As an administrator, check the items that state your administrative staff's view and, then, your own.

1. ___A. Is aware of and manages the "hidden curriculum" being implemented in the school; or

___B. Is oblivious to the "hidden curriculum" and allows it to run the school.

2. ___A. Trusts the staff and gives the necessary autonomy to implement Mastery Learning effectively; or

___B. Second-guesses staff members as they attempt to learn and teach.

3. ___A. Cares about the school, the staff, and the students; or

___B. Is an inaccessible, bureaucratic hardnose.

4. ___A. Respects and provides for the human needs and concerns of the staff; or

___B. Administers from an "ivory tower."

5. ___A. Knows that satisfaction and achievement are positively related to one another; or

___B. Subscribes to the principle of "You don't have to like it, you just have to do it."

6. ___A. Is an active listener and judges both the intent and the content of the message being delivered; or

___B. Strives to "get the work out" from the top down.

SCORING INSTRUCTIONS: (Score administrative staff and yourself separately)

1. Count number of "A" responses and indicate total:_____

2. Count number of "B" resporses and indicate total:_____

3. If you have:

0 - 6 "A" responses	-	Don't try it, just hope you survive!
7 - 12 "A" responses	-	You stand a chance. Do some more reading in the areas where you scored lowest.
12 or more "A"'s	-	Go for it. You probably have the skills to do the job.
More "B"'s than "A"'s	-	Better go back to the "Drawing Board" and brush up on your administrative theory!

It is not surprising to note that the very administrative skills necessary for successful involvement in Mastery Learning are precisely those which staff should model for children. As STAFF DEVELOPERS, administrators should follow a highly individualized model for inservice and staff development; as INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS, administrators should make an effort to observe outcomes (learning), rather than just the means (teaching) to such outcomes; as CLIMATE MANAGERS, administrators must recognize and provide for the human resource development of schools through caring behavior.

It is important to implement what Spady calls the official, real, and "hidden" curricula with a uniform focus on both achievement and satisfaction as being the hallmark of school operation. If Mastery Learning is subverted and its intent diminished, it will be because educators chose to drop the term "human" from the title of Dr. Bloom's book, Human Characteristics and School Learning. Both cognitive and affective growth, achievement and satisfaction are NECESSARY in Mastery Learning!